

## A Turkish al-Qaeda: The Islamic Jihad Union and the Internationalization of Uzbek Jihadism

by Guido Steinberg

*Strategic Insights* is a bi-monthly electronic journal produced by the Center for Contemporary Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

### Introduction

In early March 2008, an organization called the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) announced on a Turkish website, that Cüneyt Çiftçi, a Turk born and living in Germany had carried out a suicide attack on American and Afghan troops in the Afghan province of Paktika. The website showed pictures of Çiftçi while training for and preparing the attack. This announcement marked the first peak of an intensive public relations campaign that the IJU began in September 2007. In April 2008, Çiftçi's video was followed by one of a German convert training in an IJU camp in Pakistan, Eric Breininger, who called for Muslims living in Germany to join the "Jihad" against the West. In a bid to gain access to new recruits and funds the organization tries to present itself on the Internet as a transnational organization with supporters in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe. Its main recruitment target, however, seem to be young Turks and Germans. This became evident after three of its members were arrested in the Sauerland town of Oberschledorn in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia in September 2007. They were suspected of planning bomb attacks on American and possibly Uzbek targets in Germany. The planned attack in Germany sought to support the struggle of Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan by attempting to swing the German debate on extending the parliamentary mandates for the deployment of the German Army in Afghanistan (OEF and ISAF). The IJU leadership apparently calculated that high-profile attacks just before the Bundestag votes in October and November 2007 could prevent an extension and force the withdrawal of German troops. The Taliban and al-Qaeda have long regarded Germany as the weakest link in the chain of major troop providers and wanted to exploit growing criticism of the campaign in Afghanistan in the German public sphere.

The "Sauerland cell" as they were subsequently called, was part of a larger group of about 30 young Jihadists, most of them ethnic Turks living in Germany and several converts, who had radicalized for several years and partly gone to Pakistan to receive terrorist training. Several completed their courses in an IJU camp in North Waziristan. Most important about this development was that for the first time, ethnic Turks in Germany had radicalized in significant numbers. Since al-Qaeda was and—to a lesser extent—still is a predominantly Arab phenomenon, it had not been able to recruit Turks into its networks on a large scale. This seems to have changed, because the IJU—an organization closely affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban—has increasingly recruited ethnic Turks and tries to increase its attractiveness among Turks in Germany and in Turkey itself by using a Turkish language website hosted in Turkey. The reason for the success of the IJU, an Uzbek militant organization that splintered off from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in 2002, in appealing to Turkish Jihadists is quite simple: Turks and Uzbeks are related Turkic peoples and speak similar languages. An Uzbek organization that operates transnationally and takes an internationalist line like the IJU is

therefore ideally suited for recruiting Turks—either from Turkey itself or from the European diaspora—for al-Qaeda's global Jihad.

The fact that al-Qaeda has recently been able to broaden its recruitment base to include greater numbers of non-Arab Muslims, including Pakistanis, Kurds, and Turks, many of them living in the European diaspora, is in itself threatening. The recruitment of an increasing number of Turks would strengthen the trend which has been apparent since 2003 that al-Qaeda is rapidly transforming itself into a truly global organization. Furthermore, if the recruitment of Turks should prove to be part of a larger trend towards their radicalization, Germany—besides Turkey—with its more than two million Turks will be primarily affected. In that case, the terrorist threat in Germany is likely to grow substantially, for German targets and for American installations on German soil.

## A Jihadist Public Relations Campaign

When news of the "Sauerland plot" broke in September 2007, only a few specialists in Germany had ever heard of the IJU. There was a strong tendency to doubt any information presented by the Uzbek government and its allies about Jihadist terrorism in Central Asia. A former British ambassador in Tashkent, Craig Murray, a fierce critic of the Karimov regime, supported this trend by claiming in several interviews with German media that bomb attacks in Uzbekistan in 2004 which were blamed on the IJU (which then still called itself Islamic Jihad Group) were rather staged by Uzbek authorities.<sup>[1]</sup> A domestic intelligence official from the South-Western state of Baden-Württemberg added to this doubts by declaring in a newspaper interview that he doubted that such an organization even existed—after the Federal Ministry of Interior and the Chief Federal Prosecutor had named the IJU as the organization behind the plotters.<sup>[2]</sup>

However, it was the IJU's public relations campaign after September 2007 which highlighted that the group indeed existed and had developed into an organization with an increasingly internationalist orientation after 2004. In June 2007 already it had published an interview with its alleged leader, Ebu Yahya Muhammed Fatih, on Turkish Jihadist websites, in which he outlined the goals and ideology of the IJU.<sup>[3]</sup> Ebu Yahya's interview only gained the attention it merited after the arrest of the Sauerland cell. From September, the IJU started posting an increasing amount of propaganda messages and videos on the Turkish website [www.sehadetvakti.com](http://www.sehadetvakti.com) ("Time for Martyrdom"), which has been online since November 2006. In early September, a "press release" signed by the "political leadership of the IJU" appeared on this website, commenting on the arrest of the Sauerland cell some days earlier.<sup>[4]</sup> It stated that the three "brothers" had planned attacks on the U.S. airbase in Ramstein/Germany and on the American and Uzbek consulates. Their goal had been to protest against U.S. and Uzbek policy and to prompt Germany to give up its base in Termez/Uzbekistan. Most interestingly, many of the texts posted on [www.sehadetvakti.com](http://www.sehadetvakti.com) (including the interview) are written in faulty Turkish, suggesting that the authors might be Uzbeks or perhaps Turks who have spent most of their lives in Germany.<sup>[5]</sup> The IJU is trying hard to develop a corporate identity under its Turkish name "İslami Cihad İttehadi." The videos frequently feature black banners with its Arabic name "İttihad al-Jihad al-Islami" or its (abbreviated) English translation "Islamic Jihad." The videos have allegedly been produced by the organization's media wing "Badr at-Tawhid" (literally "the full moon of monotheism") and mostly contain a short lead text in Arabic:

- One of the earlier documents dated December 27, 2007 is titled "An IJU Operation: The End of the apostates."<sup>[6]</sup> The video allegedly shows destroyed vehicles and killed security personnel after an IJU attack on a Pakistani military convoy in the Swat valley northwest of Islamabad.
- In a second video posted December 30, 2007 and entitled "IJU: Travellers to Martyrdom," photos and video sequences of IJU-"martyrs" are shown—some speaking Pashtu.<sup>[7]</sup> Added is video footage of some two dozen recruits in makeshift IJU-training camps in the Pakistani tribal areas.

- The third posting was dated January 3, 2008 and is called "Mortar attack on a base of the British occupying troops." The accompanying text describes an attack on a British base in the Afghan province of Paktika. The video shows a small group of fighters firing mortar shells from a position in the mountains on a military base in a valley.

From March 2008, more content linked to German and Turkish recruits was posted on the website. In a "press statement" that was released on March 7, the authors of the website announced the "martyrdom" of Cüneyt Çiftçi.[8] In April, Çiftçi's video testament and Eric Breininger's call for Jihad followed.

The texts and videos provided conclusive evidence that the IJU indeed exists and give some rare insights into an organization virtually unknown until recently. They added to scattered information about the IJU's terrorist plots, its worldview, goals, strategies and its activities in Pakistan as well as its social base and structure. Although the IJU is originally an Uzbek organization which still aims at toppling the regime of President Islam Karimov, it has adopted an internationalist agenda and has moved closer to the Taliban, or rather the Haqqani network, and al-Qaeda. From its headquarters in North Waziristan the IJU has joined the Haqqani network and its escalating fight against coalition forces in Afghanistan. The IJU's public campaign seems to be a reaction to growing pressure from the U.S. and the Pakistani governments. In October 2007 the Pakistani army launched an offensive against Uzbek fighters in Mir Ali in North Waziristan, most likely in order to destroy the IJU's headquarter which is situated there. Furthermore, the elimination of Abu Laith al-Libi, the liaison officer between the al-Qaeda leadership and the IJU, in January 2008 on Pakistani territory (and similar attacks in early 2008) shows that the United States is prepared to risk conflict with the government in Islamabad in order to prevent the Jihadists from still becoming stronger in the tribal areas.

## **The IJU: A Splinter Group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**

The IJU was established in 2002, after some internationalist minded activists left its mother organization, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU, in turn, had been founded in 1998 in Kabul. Predecessors of the organization had already existed since 1990. Its leaders were two Uzbeks from the Fergana Valley, Juma Namangani (1968/1969-2001) and Tahir Yoldashev (born 1968). While the famous Namangani organized the IMU's military activities, Yoldashev, who had received a religious education, became its major ideologue. After Namangani was killed by an American air strike in Afghanistan in November 2001, Yoldashev took the overall leadership.

The IMU aimed exclusively at toppling the regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov. However, the fact that most members of the organization were from the Fergana valley meant that it had a transnational component as well. Mainly inhabited by ethnic Uzbeks, the valley was divided in the 1920s between the three Soviet republics Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The division brought about a complex mixture of territories and ethnic groups, the main reason why Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have also become targets of the IMU. The IMU is thus actually more of a Fergana valley liberation movement, fighting the three ruling regimes there, rather than a purely Uzbek organization. This became most obvious in 1999 and 2000, when the IMU reached the peak of its activities. In February 1999, the IMU is alleged to have perpetrated a string of attacks in Tashkent. Six car bombs detonated during an attempt to assassinate President Karimov. Thirteen people died, more than a hundred were wounded. In the following two summers, IMU fighters entered the Fergana valley from Tajikistan and tried to destabilize Uzbekistan. Their raids deepened already existing conflicts between the governments of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan which held one another responsible for the escalation of violence. Although the IMU had moved to Afghanistan in 1998 (after Namangani had participated in the civil war in Tajikistan until 1997), it still had a base in Tavildara/Tajikistan and could count on sympathies among Tajik politicians protecting it from Karimov's wrath.

In Afghanistan, the IMU set up its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz in the north of the country. From 1998 to 2001, it commanded roughly 2000 fighters, many of whom fought with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance.<sup>[9]</sup> Most of its personnel were Uzbeks, but there were Kyrgyzs, Tajiks, Chechens and even some Uighurs from the Chinese province of Xinjiang among them. The Taliban seem to have sent Chechen and Uighur volunteers up north to join the IMU. Hence they were able to deny the presence of these groups whenever Russian and Chinese officials protested the residence of their militant opposition on Taliban territory. Thus, the IMU in its Afghan years developed into an increasingly transnational, Central Asian rather than an exclusively Uzbek organization, without, however, adjusting its leadership structure and without redefining its goals and strategy. The IMU's leaders repeatedly declared that they aimed exclusively at the downfall of the Uzbek government and not of the other Central Asian states. However, the organization's activities in Tajikistan and especially Kyrgyzstan suggested otherwise. Within the IMU, there were serious debates about a possible internationalization, in which the more conservative nationalist forces seem to have gained the upper hand. As a consequence, in 2001, the IMU leadership denied reports that the organization had changed its name to Islamic Party of Turkestan and that it now aimed at an Islamic Revolution in the whole of Central Asia.<sup>[10]</sup> Nevertheless, increasing contacts to other Central Asians, the Taliban, Pakistanis and Arab fighters in Afghanistan added to an increasing trend towards internationalization among Uzbeks, too.

During the invasion of Afghanistan, starting October 2001, the IMU suffered massive losses. Under the leadership of Tahir Yoldashev, its remaining members retreated from Northern and Central Afghanistan to Wana in South Waziristan on the Pakistani side of the Afghan-Pakistani border zone. Yoldashev responded to the trend towards internationalization by devoting more of his speeches to conflicts outside Central and Southern Asia, declaring in online statements that the IMU supported the struggle against the West in Chechnya, Iraq and Palestine. But this seems to have been mainly propaganda, for elsewhere in his messages, Yoldashev repeatedly emphasized that the IMU's primary aim was to overthrow the regimes in the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and that it had not renounced its original goals in Central Asia.<sup>[11]</sup> The foundation of the IJU was a consequence of the IMU's refusal to cater to the needs of the young internationalists in its ranks.

## **The Emergence of the Islamic Jihad Union**

The IJU was most likely founded in Pakistan in 2002 by a small group of former members of the IMU, possibly in North Waziristan, where the organization is still based today. Its leader is Najmiddin Jalolov, an Uzbek who had been sentenced to death by an Uzbek court in 2000 but was never apprehended. However, most of the information about Jalolov seems to be based on Uzbek government sources, which can not be considered reliable.<sup>[12]</sup> His deputy is Mansur Sohail (aka Abu Huzaifa), himself an ethnic Uzbek.<sup>[13]</sup> Not much is known about the rest of the organization. It can be safely assumed that it is small, most likely consisting of no more than one hundred to two hundred members. Most of them are from Uzbekistan, but they also include Tajiks, Kyrgyzs and Kazakhs, and it also cooperates closely with Chechen and Uighur militants.

The IJU is commonly thought to be identical with the Islamic Jihad Group (IJG), an organization which claimed responsibility for the first suicide bomb attacks in Central Asia ever. In late March and early April 2004, some of its members carried out suicide attacks and firing raids mainly targeting Uzbek police in Bukhara and Tashkent. Forty-seven people died, most of them terrorists. In July 2004 members of the IJG staged suicide attacks on the Israeli and U.S. embassies and on the office of the attorney general in the Uzbek capital Tashkent. These were the first attacks on Western targets in Central Asia, hinting at the internationalist character of the group responsible. Moreover, the strikes coincided with the trials against members of the IJG who had organized the attacks in March and April. In both cases, claims of responsibility by a "Jama'at al-Jihad al-Islami" or Islamic Jihad Group were posted on Arabic Jihadist websites.<sup>[14]</sup>

The events had a second international dimension. In November 2004, Kazakh authorities confirmed earlier reports of contacts between the perpetrators of the attacks in Bukhara and Tashkent and Kazakhstan. They reportedly discovered a terrorist grouping called the „Mujahedin of Central Asia Group," which seems to have been identical with the IJG or one of its cells. According to the reports, it had been founded in 2002 and consisted of fifty Uzbek and twenty Kazakh citizens. The group in Kazakhstan was lead by a Kyrgyz, its branch in Uzbekistan by an Uzbek, both former members of the IMU. Some of the perpetrators of the bombings in Tashkent in spring 2004 had been trained in the southern Kazakh city of Shimkent close to the Uzbek border. The attacks had been planned, however, by the group's overall leadership in Pakistan.[15]

In 2005, the IJG changed its name to IJU. In the following years, all its plots were thwarted by the respective authorities. In November 2006, a cell of Pakistani IJU members were reported to have been arrested because they were preparing rocket attacks on government targets in Islamabad. The IJU leadership in North Waziristan is said to have trained those who were to carry out the attacks, supplied them with weapons and issued them with orders. Their motive had allegedly been the Pakistani government's support for the United States.[16] The Sauerland plot in September 2007 followed a similar mode of action. The attackers—non-Central-Asians again—were trained in IJU camps in North Waziristan, where the IJU leadership and its allies planned the attacks. They were then sent to their home country to organize and implement the scheme. The Central Asian IJU members, however, took part in the guerrilla campaign in Afghanistan on the side of the Taliban rather than plots against Western targets.

Although the plan was thwarted, the recruitment of the Sauerland cell was the IJU's biggest success to date. While the core cell that was arrested in September 2007 consisted of two German converts and one ethnic Turk, these were radicalized in a broader environment, consisting of around 30 persons currently under investigation by German authorities. These are in their majority German Turks who were in different ways connected to the Salafist scene in Ulm and Neu-Ulm in South-Western Germany. For the first time, German Turks were radicalized in larger numbers and joined a Jihadist organization. From 2001, the Multikulturhaus in Neu-Ulm had become a rallying point for young Salafists, among them Turks, Arabs, and German converts alike. As a result of their radicalization, between ten and twenty of them went to train in IJU camps in Pakistan from 2006. Although in their majority known to the security services, it came as a surprise to German authorities when the United States intercepted e-mail communications between the IJU and its followers in Germany.[17] German intelligence and police services have in general been unable to trace these developments among young Muslims in Germany, a fact provoking questions about the effectiveness of German counter-terrorism measures.

## **Islamic Jihad Union, the Haqqani Network, and al-Qaeda**

Part of the reason why the IJU was virtually unknown in 2007 was that it is difficult to distinguish it from the IMU. In most cases, reports about Uzbeks or Central Asians in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan do not differentiate between the two organizations. Only after more information was disclosed in 2007 and the IJU started its public relations campaign on the internet it became easier to make the distinction.

Most importantly, the IJU developed into an increasingly internationalist organization and thus tried to gain a profile independent of the IMU and its Islamo-nationalism. In his interview of May 2007, Ebu Yahya Muhammed Fatih explained that the IJU still intended to overthrow the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan but that this was only one of the organization's goals and that its main area of operations in 2007 was Afghanistan.[18] He said the IJU was trying to coordinate its activities with other Central Asians and fighters from the Caucasus. In addition the IJU—according to Ebu Yahya—was striving to spread the "Jihad" throughout the world in order to liberate Muslims from the tyranny of the infidels. This struggle would only end when Islam ruled the entire world. Although the vision of a war that will only end when all Muslims live in Islamic states indicates differences with the IMU, it is rather the practical realization of these ideological principles—

namely the plots in Tashkent, Islamabad and Germany—that makes the more internationalist nature of the IJU most apparent.

Furthermore, the IJU has entered into an alliance with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. It has established its headquarters in Mir Ali, a city in North Waziristan in the Pakistani tribal areas. In order to maintain a presence there, it had to enter into an alliance with the Haqqani network, the most important local Taliban grouping. The Haqqani network is named after its leader, Jalaladdin Haqqani, a famous Mujahedin commander during the 1980s and a close ally of Usama Bin Laden. The Haqqani network constitutes an almost separate wing within the Taliban movement although nominally it operates under the authority of Mullah Umar. From its headquarters in Miranshah, the capital of North Waziristan, it is the main executor of Taliban operations in the central part of Eastern Afghanistan, namely in the provinces of Khost, Paktia and Paktika. Although the elder Haqqani is still alive, his eldest son Sirajaddin seems to have assumed command over the Haqqani forces. Sirajaddin Haqqani has proved an even more ruthless and brutal commander than his father. Under his leadership, the Haqqani network has increasingly adopted al-Qaeda-in-Iraq-style tactics like suicide bombings and attacks with IEDs in 2007. Furthermore, his followers increasingly operate in Kabul and its surroundings. For instance, coalition forces have held Haqqani responsible for the attack on the Kabul Serena Hotel in January 2008.[\[19\]](#)

The IJU seems to have blended in with Haqqani's campaign in Afghanistan, as Haqqani has increasingly brought Pakistanis, Central Asians and Arabs into Afghanistan. It cooperates closely with al-Qaeda as well. The Libyan Abu Laith al-Libi, one of Bin Laden's most important field commanders, was the liaison figure between the al-Qaeda leadership and the IJU. Libi cultivated particularly close ties with the Taliban and was also a kind of Central Asia representative for the al-Qaeda leadership. He was part of a new generation of operational chiefs who played a key role in al-Qaeda's resurgence since 2005.[\[20\]](#) Libi seems to have led the intensification of the IJU's activities since the end of 2006. It is highly likely that Abu Laith al-Libi was the mastermind of the Sauerland plot as well. In January 2008, he was killed with a missile strike from an American drone in Mir Ali. The IJU confirmed that during the air attack on Libi, whom it referred to as "our Shaikh," a number of its members were also killed.[\[21\]](#) Prominent members of the Haqqani network were targeted by similar attacks in early 2008.

Apart from its operations in Afghanistan, the IJU has also attacked Pakistani targets in late 2007 and early 2008. Although it is difficult to establish the authenticity of some of the video footage on [sehadetvakti.com](#), the IJU's anti-Pakistani impetus seems to become increasingly obvious. Most importantly, in a message posted on the website in March 2008, the IJU pledged revenge for the storm on the Red Mosque in Islamabad in July 2007 and announced attacks on American and Pakistani targets.[\[22\]](#)

## **The Rift between the Islamic Jihad Union and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**

The IMU and its leader Tahir Yoldashev, on their part, only partly adapted their ideology and strategy to the emergence of the IJU. However, the IMU was not totally unaffected by the trend towards internationalization that the IJU spearheaded by breaking away from its IMU mother organization. As early as 1998, it moved closer to more globally oriented groups like al-Qaeda. This was in part due to its growing number of non-Uzbek recruits and its cooperation with Chechens and Uighurs. In addition, by operating together with the Taliban, its Pakistani sympathizers and al-Qaeda's Arab fighters, the IMU strengthened the feeling of solidarity between the different nationalities. Had the organization focused its efforts entirely on Uzbekistan it would have risked losing the support of non-Uzbeks. This was especially true after 2001, when the IMU lost its base in Afghanistan and was forced to operate from Waziristan.

However, due to their focus on Uzbekistan, IMU fighters only occasionally participated in the campaigns of the Taliban and its Pakistani and Arab followers in Afghanistan. This made it vulnerable to criticism by local supporters of the Taliban campaign in Waziristan, a reproach that Yoldashev sought to counter by rhetorically supporting an internationalist agenda. Until March 2007, the IMU headquarters and training facilities were located in South Waziristan, in its capital Wana and several small villages west of the city.[23] There are no reliable estimates of the IMU's numerical strength; they range from several hundred to several thousand. In Waziristan, however, there seem to be some 1000 Uzbek fighters.[24] After violent clashes with Pashtun tribesmen in March and April 2007 many Uzbeks had to leave their strongholds around Wana. These events gave some hints as to the exact nature of the ideological differences between IJU and IMU.

Reports about conflicts between the IMU and their hosts started appearing as early as 2006. According to local sources, the Uzbeks had not respected local traditions and customs, appropriated local land, and behaved liked an occupying power, at times even killing some tribesmen. People whom the IMU so much as suspected of collaborating with the Pakistani authorities were carelessly executed. They allegedly even killed an important Saudi al-Qaeda finance official. More importantly, however, seem to have been conflicts between local Pashtun tribesmen. The Uzbeks in Wana had been hosted and protected by Maulvi Omar, a leader of the Ahmadzai Wazir settling in Wana and its surroundings.[25] Omar is considered a close ally of Baitullah Mehsud, an important Pakistani supporter of the Taliban and an ally of Yoldashev and his IMU. Nevertheless, Omar lost his position in a power struggle against Maulvi Nazir, another prominent member of the Ahmedzai Wazir, who thereby gained the leading position among the local supporters of the Taliban. Nazir seems to have had some support by the Afghan Taliban. This was the local context in which the conflict with the Uzbeks and their local supporters developed.

When tribesmen tried to evict the Uzbeks from their positions near Wana, fighting erupted in March 2007. The IMU lost between fifty and one hundred men and at least parts of the organization had to withdraw to the neighboring territory of the Mehsud in South Waziristan and to North Waziristan.

Ideological and strategical motives, although not prevalent, still seem to have played a significant role in these conflicts as well. In most reports two groups of Uzbek fighters are mentioned: "good Uzbeks" and "bad Uzbeks." The "good Uzbeks" seem to be those who wholeheartedly support the Taliban and their campaign in Afghanistan, namely the IJU and possibly other factions. Tahir Yoldashev and his IMU are rather characterized as the "bad Uzbeks"[26] The most important criticism leveled against them seems to have been that the IMU preferred fighting against apostate Muslim regimes rather than Western unbelievers. They were ready to fight the Pakistani state (and, of course, the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan), but didn't join the Taliban in their fight against the United States and their allies in Afghanistan.[27] This explains why the Taliban supported the IMU's local adversaries in spring 2007. However, this analysis should not be misconstrued to overemphasize the ideological and strategical differences either between the Uzbek organizations or between the IMU and the Taliban. The conflict between local tribal entities was more important than the ideological fault line.

Nevertheless, the events clearly showed the IMU's lack of enthusiasm for the campaign in Afghanistan—the main difference with the IJU. Its anti-Pakistani stance—surprising if one bears in mind its focus on Uzbekistan and Central Asia—might be explained with the pragmatic exigencies of pleasing its Pakistani host. Their most important ally in Waziristan is Baitullah Mehsud, an increasingly prominent figure among Pakistani supporters of the Taliban who in December 2007 was named leader of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan). Since 2006/2007, Mehsud has stepped up his campaign against the Pakistani state and has been held responsible for attacks outside the Pashtun tribal areas in central Pakistan. For instance, the Pakistani and U.S. governments have sought him as the mastermind behind the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007. If the IMU wants to retain Mehsud's support, they have to join

his fight against the Pakistani government. Furthermore, the Pakistani army has launched several attacks on the IMU's bases in Waziristan in recent years, the first major one in spring 2004. This has made Mehsud a natural ally, especially after the Pakistani army increased pressure on him in January 2007. Uzbeks seem to have taken part in fights between Pakistani forces and Mehsud tribal units.[28] Tahir Yoldashev confirmed his support for Mehsud's anti-Pakistani stance in a video message in January 2008, calling for an intensification of the "Holy War" against the Pakistani security forces, the conquest of Islamabad and the introduction of the "sharia" in Pakistan.[29]

Nevertheless, the effect of ideological differences seems to be limited. Both the IMU and the IJU are first and foremost Uzbek organizations, who share some important goals but differ on emphasis. Perhaps they cooperate intensively on a more informal and personal level than any clear-cut differentiation between the two organizations might suggest.

### **An Uzbek-Turkish al-Qaeda?**

The future of the IJU is uncertain. In spite of several setbacks in 2007, the IMU remains by far the larger Uzbek organization. It remains to be seen whether the IJU's close alliance with the Taliban and al-Qaeda will provide it with the necessary number of recruits and adequate finances to build a larger organization. Its most important achievement to date has been the successful recruitment of Turks and Europeans of Turkish origin. For some time already, Turkish Jihadists have sympathized strongly with the cause of the Chechens and Central Asians, as is obvious from numerous Turkish-language Jihadist websites. Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, continues to be an organization dominated by Arabs, which to date has failed to recruit Turks in large numbers. It therefore regards a partnership with the IJU as an opportunity to rectify this deficit.

Whether the IJU can continue to play a role strongly depends on future developments in the Pakistani tribal areas. Frequent attacks by U.S. drones on the IJU, al-Qaeda, and the Haqqani network show that the United States understands the nature of the threat emanating from Waziristan. The IJU is an extremely small organization, which could, after some major setbacks like the loss of Libi and several presumably important members in January, rapidly disappear from the scene again. Its biggest advantage is that it enjoys the support of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and it currently seems to be in a position to continue operating and training in North Waziristan.

Whether the IJU can establish a new terrorist network dominated by Uzbeks and Turks and maintain it in the longer term remains to be seen. But the events of 2007 have given a clear warning. An Uzbek organization that operates transnationally and adopts an internationalist strategy like the IJU is ideally suited for recruiting Turks—either from Turkey itself or from the European diaspora—for al-Qaeda's global Jihad. Al-Qaeda has proved able to recruit a larger number of Turks, it is becoming an increasingly multinational organization and therefore, the terrorist threat not only in Turkey and Germany, home to a diaspora of more than two million Turkish inhabitants, is likely to stay on a high level or even escalate further.

For more insights into contemporary international security issues, see our *Strategic Insights* home page. To have new issues of *Strategic Insights* delivered to your Inbox, please email [ccc@nps.edu](mailto:ccc@nps.edu) with subject line "Subscribe." There is no charge, and your address will be used for no other purpose.

### **References**

1. For example, in an interview with "ARD Monitor."

2. *Die Tageszeitung*, October 4, 2007.
3. The interview was posted in Turkish: "İslami Cihad İttihadi Emiri Ebu Yahya Muhammed Fatih ile Röportaj." An English translation is available at: [http://sehadetvakti.com/haber\\_detay.php?haber\\_id=1203](http://sehadetvakti.com/haber_detay.php?haber_id=1203).
4. İslami Cihad İttihadi Basın Açıklaması, September 11, 2007.
5. In fact, even the Turkish translation for Islamic Jihad Union used by the group, "İslami Cihad İttihadi," is old-fashioned at best. The modern Turkish name is "İslami Cihad Birli ği" and if one uses Ottoman vocabulary, the correct spelling would be "İttihadi."
6. İslami Cihad İttihadi Operasyonları: Mürtedlerin sonu.
7. İslami Cihad İttihadi: Şehadet Yolcuları.
8. İslami Cihad İttihadi Basın Açıklaması.
9. Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 174.
10. Rashid, *Jihad*, 176 and 180f.
11. See, for instance, his audio message on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of 9/11. "Islamist leader threatens Central Asian presidents," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, September 17, 2006.
12. One example for reliance on Uzbek sources is: Jim Nichol, "Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests," CRS Report for Congress, Updated November 21, 2007, 11.
13. *Dawn* (Internet Edition), November 4, 2006, quoted after "Pakistani Al-Qa'idah link to failed Islamabad rocket attacks," *BBC Monitoring South Asia* vom 4. November 2006.
14. It seems to have been first posted on the prominent "Islamic Minbar" website in Switzerland, which has been closed in the meantime. .
15. Daniel Kimmage, "Kazakh Breakthrough on Uzbek Terror Case," RFE/RL, November 15, 2004; "Suspect in Uzbek terror trial says group leader was follower of Taliban fugitive Mullah Omar," *The Americas Intelligence Wire*, July 27, 2004.
16. *Dawn* (Internet Edition), November 4, 2006, quoted after "Pakistani Al-Qa'idah link to failed Islamabad rocket attacks," *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, November 4, 2006. The Pakistanis were said to have belonged to Pakistani militant organizations.
17. *Der Spiegel* 37 (2007), 20ff.
18. It has not been established whether Ebu Yahya and Jalolov are identical. "Fatih" is the Turkish and Arabic word for "conqueror" and the famous sobriquet for the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet (= Muhammad) Fatih (1432-1481), the conqueror of Constantinople. "Muhammad Fatih" was obviously chosen to evoke this association and attract young Turks.

19. Imtiaz Ali, "The Haqqani Network and Cross-Border Terrorism in Afghanistan," *Terrorism Monitor*, March 24, 2008.

20. For more details on al-Qaeda's resurgence, cp. Steinberg, Guido, *The Return of al-Qaeda. Current Developments in International Terrorism and Their Consequences for Europe* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP - Comments, No. 22, December 2007).

21. İslami Cihad İttehadi Basın Açıklaması.

22. Lal Mescidinin İntikamı Alınacaktır.

23. Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan. The Struggle with militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 144.

24. Bill Roggio, "The Taliban's internecine war in Waziristan," in *The Long War Journal*, April 6, 2007; "'Jihad' declared against Uzbeks," *Dawn* (Karachi), April 3, 2007; John C.K. Daly, Uzbek Fighters in Pakistan Reportedly Return to Afghanistan, *Jamestown Terrorism Focus* 4, No. 7 (March 27, 2007): S. 4f.